



COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES, VETERANS, CULTURE, AND
RECREATION AND THE NORTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Chair

Councilor Alisa F. Klein

Councilor Gina-Louise Sclarra

MEETING MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING ON VIBRANT SIDEWALKS
SEPT. 15, 2014 / 5:00PM
City Council Chambers, 212 Main Street
Wallace J. Puchalski Municipal Building, Northampton, MA

Meeting minutes

1. **Meeting Called to Order:** At 5:00 pm, Councilor Marianne LaBarge called the Committee on Social Services, Veterans, Culture and Recreation to order.
2. **Councilors present:** Councilor Marianne LaBarge, Councilor Alisa Klein and Councilor Gina-Louise Sclarra

In keeping with the Open Meeting Law, this meeting is also publicized as a City Council Meeting. Other members of City Council present include: Councilor Jesse Adams, and Councilor William H. Dwight, and Councilor Ryan O'Donnell.

3. **Open the Public Hearing:** Councilor Alisa Klein moved to open the public hearing; Councilor Gina Louise Sclarra seconded the motion.

Councilor Alisa Klein read into the record the resolution on Vibrant Sidewalks.

Public Comments:

- Councilor Dwight provided background for how this Resolution came to be. He indicated that the purpose of the Resolution was to discuss what it means to be a Civic Space. This discussion began in the 1970's. With the removal of the benches in the Business District a few months ago, discussion began again. Councilors have heard concerns that the existing language allows for disruptive activities on sidewalks. There is great concern vocalized by business owners who see this as a deterrent to doing business in the downtown area. He hopes that the public will help craft the better language for the Resolution without pushing the same buttons.
- Ms. Munoz of 63 Rick Dr. in Florence supports having benches installed in downtown Florence and more benches installed in downtown Northampton.
- Patte Shaughnessy, Council on Aging Director supports installation of benches in Florence and more benches in Downtown Northampton. She feels these are vital for people with disabilities or illnesses who need the opportunity to stop and rest while visiting these sections of the City.
- Debin Bruce of 46 Columbus Avenue is bothered by the infrastructure of city streets and how poorly they are maintained. Having more people around tends to invite more positive

interactions on City Streets. Regarding street crossings, Ms. Bruce expressed specific concerns about the crosswalk on South Street.

- Councilor Jesse Adams explained that two amendments were introduced in the Committee on Economic and Community Development, Housing and Land Use. Revised language helps to clarify that disruptive activities on City Streets are not the intent of this Resolution.
- Todd Ford 78 Fern St. in Florence feels that the City should promote more housing in our downtown. The benefit would be more people and allow for vibrancy of city streets. The streetscapes, including street trees are important. He recommends having discussions in Florence as well as down town.
- Ruth McGrath of 52 Longview Drive in Florence feels that benches in downtown Florence are important. She avoids shopping in Florence because she is disabled and needs opportunities to stop and sit.
- Jasper Lapienski from South Street condemns the Mayor for removing benches in downtown Northampton.
- Jonathon Wynn of 25 Summer St. is a professor of Sociology at UMASS in Amherst. He cited Bryant Park as a place where Vibrant Sidewalks exist. He explained that sociologist William H. White examined this issue and concluded there are four key components of successful places: lots of groups, greater proportions of women, lots of places to sit, and variability from day to day and month to month. Measures taken to combat undesirables can be made more positive by
 - Incorporating art objects that strangers can dialogue about
 - Surveillance of business owners and others,
 - Create space for desirables and undesirables alike
- Sarah Hougen of Elizabeth St. has never owned a car and does a lot of walking to get from place to place. Street safety is of concern for her. She is encouraged by what she is hearing.
- Maggie Striebel of 124 South St. feels we have a unique situation because people are willing to dialogue about this type of thing. She feels that there a lot of great ideas, but there is no mechanism for these ideas to coalesce.
- Adam Dunetz of 121 Williams St. is a downtown business owner. He hopes that the group can acknowledge that this is a complex issue and feels that adding benches may not create the desired effect.
- Michael Nagy of Hampton Ave. suggests that 2 or 3 foot ramps that can be made available to the disabled will allow for greater accessibility to city businesses.

The Public Hearing will remain open; a second Public Hearing on Vibrant Sidewalks will be held on Tuesday, Oct. 14, 2014 at the Florence Civic Center on Park Street in Florence. The Hearing will begin at 7:00pm.

The meeting adjourned at 5:55 pm.